

## **My Air BnB Story**

**By Michelle Cole**

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in 2008 the market crashed. This combination severely changed our lives. In 2011 my husband and I found ourselves caught in the clutches of the market crash. We had managed to hang in there from 2008 through 2011, but then it caught up to us quickly. We made the painful decision to list our condo on Oahu in a low real estate market, which we felt would be better than facing a foreclosure, knowing full well that we might not be able to find anything in our price range to purchase in Hawaii. It was hard to find a buyer that qualified to buy our property, it took an entire year to sell. Times were tough, but somehow we made it.

We moved back to Kauai in 2012 after selling our condo. Kauai had been our home since the early 80's for me and the early 70's for Serafin. We were SO excited to be "back home" again. Having lived on Kauai for 14 years prior to moving to Oahu to take care of my aging parents, we felt we knew exactly what we were getting into and we were just happy to be back where we had lots of friends and some family.

After finding a home we could afford in a good neighborhood, we were even more excited! I had a job when I moved to Kauai, but both Serafin and my daughter Selena were finding it impossible to find work that could support them. In the end they decided to move back to Oahu for work. All of a sudden I was left all alone in a huge house. One morning I woke up feeling a bit sad for myself, that's right I was having a "pity party" all by myself. I thought as I started to tear up, "Hey!! Google it!" so I googled "Empty nester, lonely" and **BANG!** Up came Air BnB!!

I couldn't believe it could be that simple. This would answer ALL my problems, I wouldn't have a big empty house any more, I wouldn't be lonely anymore, and on top of that this would also improve my earning capacity, which would allow for my husband to come back home. The biggest hurdle (I thought) would be to create the web page, I was wrong. Air BnB made a user interface SO easy that even a 55 year old with NO computer experience could come up with a professional web page.

I started to follow the format, answering all the questions and writing the descriptions, I even got the Map Quest directions, got into my car and drove to my house to be SURE they were correct. This took me the entire morning, so after installing the Air BnB app on my phone, I decided to take a break. As I sat down to eat my sandwich my phone chimed letting me know that I already had an inquiry!! I was amazed! This woman liked my write up and was interested in booking, she just wanted to see some pictures. I turned every light on in my house and ran about with my iPad and got pictures and uploaded them onto my Air BnB web site. She made a booking, before I even finished lunch! I'll never forget that first booking, I cried, I was SO grateful. Soon I would have some company.

The idea this country was founded on is the idea of free enterprise, and for the very first time in a long, long time I felt that this company had allowed me the opportunity to expand my horizons. To be able to find an economic system where few restrictions are placed on business activities and ownership. A system where government has minimal ownership of enterprise in the market place. Feeling certain that this system aims for limited restrictions on trade and minimal government intervention. I was ecstatic!

Airbnb is an important option for middle class families in America to earn extra money. The best part is, that now I am able to pay my mortgage and monthly bills. Thanks to Air BnB I was able to avoid foreclosure.

We have had the most amazing people come visit us, it has been a pure joy to be a host with Air BnB. It's like traveling all around the world, and all I have to do is go out to my dining room table and break bread with my guests. We LOVE to hear about all the places they have travelled, they often have pictures they share with us and great stories as well. I am never lonely, thanks to Air BnB and these wonderful guests.

I love the way Air BnB works, kind of like an escrow company, they collect the fees up front, but they do not release these fees to the host until 24 hour after the guests have checked in. This process allows time for the traveler to check in and make sure they are happy with their accommodations. Air BnB also has an insurance standard that protects the host's from any property damage. They are very careful to identify anyone who joins Air BnB, giving us confidence in who we are dealing with from the start. They have a review system as well, making it easy to see how the travelers and hosts were received by others.

In these economic hard times, I sincerely hope that when you are making you decisions regarding business opportunities like Air BnB, you will consider BOTH the hosts that benefit from being able to add an extra income and company to the guests who benefit from being able to stay at a lower cost, to the small businesses that profit from added revenues'. Let's not forget that these guests who stay in Airbnb listings generate sustainable, local economic activity that supports the small businesses in communities here on our tiny island of Kauai. Any money saved on the guest's nightly rate is usually spent in our community, boat rides, helicopter rides, farmers market, snorkel lessons, bike rentals, meals out, rental cars, etc., it all adds to our economy. These are very important factors for our economic growth, not only as an island but as a country as a whole.

Please support free enterprise, we hear, all too often, that "we" as a people should "do more to support ourselves and rely less on government to support us" Air BnB supports and promotes these sentiments. Help us to help our economy and each other by supporting free enterprise.

Aloha,

Michelle

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